

Your Limit Doesn't Exist

Sometimes I wished that I could capture a moment in time, hold it like something tangible, and keep it forever. That was what I thought the first time I saw her--she was laughing. She laughed with her entire body, her entire soul. The mirth bubbled out of her as if she couldn't control it. The sound of her joy bled out into the world, and all I could think was: *she looks so happy.*

Before I could pull my gaze away, she looked at me. She flashed a smile and soon, she was walking towards us. I pretended to be interested in my sandwich. She looked part Asian, with a gold eyebrow ring and dark brown hair that fell over her shoulders in soft waves. She was the definition of a Cool Asian Girl, whereas I lived as a Nerdy Asian Girl.

Holding up an expensive-looking camera, she said, "Can I take a picture of you two for Students' Union?"

"Sure," I said as Maddie said, "We're not members."

Maddie frowned at me, and I shrugged.

The girl glanced awkwardly between us.

"Yes," I said, ignoring Maddie's raised eyebrow.

She took a few shots of us, checking her work on the display screen. "Want to see?"

I nodded, while Maddie rolled her eyes. A buzz of nervous energy tingled over my skin as I leaned over her shoulder. The photos were lovely—the angle was flattering and the fall colours of the courtyard vibrant behind us. I exhaled, "Wow."

She grinned. "I'm Kaori."

"J-Juniper," I said.

“Juniper?” Maddie was looking at me incredulously. Only my parents and my least favourite professors called me Juniper. She turned her attention back to Kaori. “I’m *Madison*,” she emphasized her full name. “But everyone calls me Maddie.”

“Everyone calls me JL.” I tried to correct myself, but my initials sounded weird on my tongue.

“Nice to meet you, Maddie,” said Kaori. “Juniper is a super cute name. I’d like to call you that if you’re okay with it.”

“Y-yeah,” I said, avoiding Maddie’s stare.

“I’m still on picture duty,” said Kaori, gesturing to the camera. “If you girls are interested in photography, pop by the Photography Club sometime. I’m the president.” She winked at me before skipping across the grass.

When she was out of earshot, Maddie squeezed my arm until it hurt. “You like her.”

“Don’t you? She seems nice.”

She shoved my shoulder. “You know what I mean. You *like* like her.”

“Are we really in the second grade now?” I sighed. “I like boys. You know I like boys! I’ve had boyfriends.”

“You can like girls too.”

I had been nervous around girls before, like Kaori, but I chalked it up to admiration and nothing more. I had nothing against same-sex couples; in fact, I was an avid ally, but that was all I’d ever been—an ally, not an active participant. With my traditional immigrant parents, anything more than allyship hadn’t been an option for me. After a moment, I said, “I don’t know.”

For the rest of the week, I felt confused. To ground myself, I brought my thoughts to Kaori’s offer about the Photography Club. I’d never been creative; I was textbook left-brained,

loving math and science and statistics. Math made sense whereas art didn't always have a right answer. Without thinking too hard about it, I found myself looking up the Photography Club. They met on Wednesday afternoons in the Arts building. I'd never set foot on this side of campus before so I told myself that this was a good opportunity to explore.

That was how I got lost in the Arts building on a Wednesday afternoon. By the time I located the correct room, I'd missed about half of the meeting so I found a place to sit nearby. When the door opened, a small handful of people filtered out. I leaned forward from my perch, peering into the room. Kaori was there, examining a variety of lenses on the table in front of her. As if she could sense my anxiety from across the hall, she looked up. Her face brightened when she saw me. "Hey, Juniper!"

"Hi."

She beckoned me inside and my feet obeyed. She said, "You should have come in."

I mumbled something about not wanting to interrupt. If she found it weird that I had awkwardly lurked outside for half an hour, it didn't show.

"Do you do photography?" she asked.

I shook my head. "No, I'm not artsy... I love the idea but I don't have the talent."

"Nonsense! You can do anything you want. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

"I'm a math major," I argued.

"So what? What's stopping you from doing other things too?"

I didn't have an answer so I offered her questions instead, about how to get started as a photographer. We talked for hours and I went home that night with a smile on my face.

Maddie was mad. Admittedly, I ditched her for a few weekends to see Kaori as we practiced taking pictures. When I showed up late to meet Maddie with my new DSLR camera, she was livid. “So you’re a photographer now?”

“I just started,” I said.

“I thought you wanted to be a math professor like your dad.”

“I do!”

“You’ve been skipping out on our study dates all week.” She wielded the edge in her voice like a weapon.

“Are you mad because I have a new hobby?”

“No, but it’s stupid that you’re doing all this to impress a girl.”

“I’m not,” I said, and I knew from the look that she gave me that she didn’t believe me. She gathered up her books and left.

I thought about texting her, but I didn’t know what to say. We were best friends since kindergarten, and not talking to Maddie felt like a part of my body was missing. I didn’t want to choose between Maddie and Kaori, just like I didn’t want to choose between math and photography. I didn’t know how to convince Maddie that maybe I could have both.

Kaori could tell that I was upset when I met with her. I told her about my fight with Maddie, skipping over the part about how Maddie thought I was doing this to impress her. She listened patiently and to my surprise, she invited me to choose a few photos for a showcase at her sister’s gallery next month. She said, “It will be a small display, but we can invite Maddie and she can see that you’re serious about this.”

It was my instinct to say no; I still had so much to learn. Before I could decline, Kaori said, “Think about it.”

I lay in bed that night, thinking about boys and girls, math and photography, derivatives and prints. I felt like I was living two lives—a caterpillar in a chrysalis, stuck mid-transformation between the safety of what I knew and a new form that was a combination of new and old. Maddie would always be my best friend, and I knew I'd always love math, but I had room in my heart to love more. I called Kaori in the morning and told her that I'd do the display.

I worked hard to envision exactly what I wanted to create. I made a virtual storyboard with the exact dimensions I wanted. Kaori laughed and said, “Your math major is showing.”

Some days, I did my homework outside until the sun was at the perfect angle, just to make sure I'd get the right lighting. By the end of four weeks, I presented Kaori and her sister with my best prints and they helped me narrow it down. We picked a shot of the math building, framed by the trees in their autumn colours. I chose a close-up of Kaori laughing, the way I had first seen her. Then, the swing set near my house where Maddie and I spent hours in our childhood. Another was of my mom and grandma making homemade wontons. Lastly, there was one of my reflection superimposed on a view of the campus courtyard through the window glass. Some were black-and-white while others were in colour, because there were many ways to see the world.

Part of me was worried that Maddie wouldn't come. There were a lot of people since the main showcase was someone well known. My heart skipped a beat when I saw a familiar form standing in front of my tiny section.

“Maddie,” I said.

“These are really good, JL.” She turned around, her blue gaze meeting mine. “I'm sorry. I didn't think you were serious about photography. You have a great eye.”

“Thank you, and I’m still good at math.” We grinned at each other. She hugged me and I squeezed back tight.

“Did you ask her out yet?” asked Maddie.

“Maybe tonight.” I said, now that I felt a lot less confused.